

THE PRESIDENT'S PAGE

The Wilson Ornithological Society comprises a balanced blend of members from the ranks of both amateurs and professionals united by a common interest in avian biology. It is advantageous to preserve this balance. But, it is particularly important too for the Society to develop programs that will attract student members because these constitute the potential ornithologists of the future. A few years ago the Society adopted the present policy permitting student members, upon graduating, to apply toward a regular life membership the total dues paid when they were students. Maybe this has not been publicized enough, or perhaps the financial status of a new graduate prevents the grasping of opportunities no matter how attractive. Whatever the reason, not many students have accepted this life membership option and its financial benefits. More recently, the Aaron M. Bagg Student Membership Awards have provided pre-paid first-year memberships to especially talented students, and this program has been very successful. Also, the Alexander Wilson Prize has recognized the best student paper presented at annual meetings. Finally, research support to graduate students has been allocated annually in the form of Louis Agassiz Fuertes Grants.

But more needs to be accomplished and I will regularly communicate to the membership concerning these actions, and also concerning other new executive initiatives of general society interest, or on other matters, particularly those requiring views expressed from the membership. This time I want to stress the matter of assistance to student research through the Fuertes Grants. In recent years the Fuertes Fund Committees have become more and more vocal concerning the difficulty of the task in selecting 1 or 2 recipients from among the increasing number of excellent applications received. There simply have not been enough funds available to award all those who deserve the aid and recognition. Of course, it is unrealistic to expect that there will ever be enough money available to reward every deserving person, but a higher proportion should receive recognition than now is the case.

There are some who have argued that indeed the recognition is really the only importance of the grants because the amounts awarded are not presently enough to be essential to graduate research. True enough, it is an honor to receive these grants and the recipients can be proud to include mention of them in their resumé's the rest of their careers. On the other hand, I know of many cases in which an amount of a few hundred dollars, such as a Fuertes Grant, has been extremely important to the successful completion of both master's and doctoral research programs. With the continuing decline in federal and state funds to support such research, through default this activity becomes increasingly thrust upon other resources such as the Fuertes Fund.

Thus, I recommend that new funds be sought to increase the number of Fuertes Awards given annually. I recognize that the primary responsibility of an organization such as the Wilson Ornithological Society is to maintain the viability of a respected research journal, and that almost all operating funds are allocated for that purpose. If the number of Fuertes Grants are to be increased this means finding ways to independently supplement that fund. Therefore, I have appointed a special committee to study this matter and make recommendations to the Executive Council at the West Virginia meeting next May. This committee is chaired by Dr. C. J. Ralph. A second charge to the committee concerns revising the application and selection process. I invite members to send their opinions on either matter to Dr. Ralph addressed to the Institute of Pacific Islands Forestry, 1151 Punchbowl Street, Honolulu, Hawaii 96813.—DOUGLAS JAMES.